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SUBJECT: ANKARA MEDIA REACTION REPORT
FRIDAY, DECEMBER 19, 2008

In Today's Papers

Armenian Apology Debate

Media outlets cover the continuing debate over the Armenian apology campaign, highlighting reactions to a CHP parliamentarian's approach as well as the written statement from the presidency on the issue. Stories also note that Prime Minister Erdogan infuriated intellectuals by saying that the supporters of the campaign must have committed genocide themselves. Mainstream Milliyet carries comments from author Adalet Agaoglu, one of the pioneers in the campaign, who says the Prime Minister should deal with problems with article 301 of the penal code instead of bothering about the campaign. Milliyet also draws attention to Armenian-American journalist Markar Esayan's article in Taraf daily that interprets the apology as a symbolic step in the direction of democratic maturity. MHP leader Bahceli on the other hand has pronounced the campaign "shameful."

Liberal daily Radikal carries a front page story about CHP deputy Canan Aritman's efforts to stoke the flames of controversy about the Armenian apology campaign by implying that President Abdullah Gul's support for the campaign might be because his grandmother was an Armenian. Radikal's report says "the racist remarks of Aritman have prompted harsh reactions, but Aritman refuses to step back. She defends herself by saying says the president should defend the rights of Turkish people instead of bothering about ethnic interests." Meanwhile the presidency released a statement to express regret about the manipulation of the issue for political goals, papers note.

Ali Bayramoglu wrote in Islamist-oriented Yeni Safak: "We can talk about a civilized society only when we are capable of cleaning our house and manage to face the agonies of the past. The ongoing campaign represents a point of no return in Turkey's democratic maturation. With this debate, one big taboo has collapsed."

Cengiz Candar wrote in liberal-intellectual Radikal: "the current tally for the signature campaign, which has reached to 14,000 and is growing, is a clear indication of how people have started listening

to the voice of their conscience."

Ergun Babahan wrote in mainstream Sabah: "People criticizing the intellectuals for their "apology campaign" violate the basic principle of freedom of thought. This is a racist approach and very shameful."

Survey Indicates Turkey Becoming More Conservative

Mainstream Milliyet, Vatan and Radikal as well as leftist Taraf carry the results of a recent survey on conservatism and tolerance in Turkey. The survey was conducted from December 2007 to July 2008 in Istanbul and 12 Anatolian cities -- Erzurum, Kayseri, Konya, Malatya, Sivas, Batman, Trabzon, Denizli, Aydin, Eskisehir, Adapazari and Balikesir -- and is based on interviews with 400 people. Co-sponsored by Bosphorus University and the Open Society Institute, the study shows that ruling the AKP has created a climate that isolates secularists in Turkey by giving open support to Islamic groups, whose economic power and influence is on the rise. The report also draws attention to the impact of "neighborhood pressures" in Turkey and describes Sunni Turks as indifferent to the demands of other religious groups. A survey conducted in 1999 showed that secularists exerted pressure on religiously devout people. Today the situation has been reversed. When the AKP swept to power, the complaints of Islamists gradually declined, while the complaints of secularists increased. Women wearing headscarves in the big cities still complain about discrimination, but women not wearing headscarves in Anatolian towns have similar complaints. It is difficult not to respect the Ramadan fast particularly in Anatolian towns and young people have been beaten for wearing low-cut dresses

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or having long hair, the survey says. Vatan columnist Rusen Cakir calls the results of the survey frightening.

Al-Qaeda was Plotting Attacks on Three Consulates

Mainstream Milliyet reports that al-Qaeda-linked terrorists captured during operations in Istanbul, Izmir and Manisa were preparing to stage car bomb attacks against the U.S., British, and Israeli Consulates. The paper notes that the terrorists reportedly received training in Pakistan and Afghanistan.

KRG against the PKK

Mainstream Vatan reports that Northern Iraqi security forces arrested 25 PKK terrorists during a rally in Suleymaniye.

Ahmet Davutoglu: "Bush's Plan has collapsed"

Leftist-nationalist Cumhuriyet reports that Ahmet Davutoglu, chief foreign policy advisor for Prime Minister Erdogan, said in an interview with the French Le Monde newspaper that President Bush's Greater Middle East Project has collapsed. Davutoglu added "an inclusive approach that will make all regional actors is required to resolve problems in the region; and that goes to include Hamas and Taliban as well."

Editorial opinion on Turkey-EU

Sami Kohen wrote in mainstream Milliyet: "From the EU's perspective, the determining factor for Turkey's membership is not its strategic importance but Turkey's internal unity and especially its performance on political reforms. Turkey should realize this soon."

TV News (CNN Turk)

Domestic

- MHP leader Bahceli said he was ashamed of the campaign launched by some intellectuals to apologize for the 1915 incidents
- MHP releases a declaration condemning the Armenian apology campaign

- Transsexual singer Bulent Ersoy acquitted in suit for saying "if she had a son she wouldn't allow him to do his military service"
- The Central Bank cuts its interest rate by 1.25
- Budget deficit for November is reported as 3.4 billion YTL
- Israeli Prime Minister Olmert to visit Ankara on Monday
- FM Babacan will go to Kosovo in mid-January

World

- Hamas officials in Gaza and Beirut say the Islamic militant group will not extend a six month truce with Israel
- Letters containing white powder have been mailed to 16 U.S. embassies across Europe
- India successfully tests a supersonic cruise missile from a moving ship
- The final withdrawal of British troops from Iraq has been officially announced by PM Gordon Brown

JEFFREY